GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:1659
ANSWERED ON:28.11.2001
SMALLPOX AS BIOLOGICAL WEAPON
T.M. SELVAGANAPATHI

Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government have issued a warning to the State Governments to be alert to handle smallpox which could be used as a biological weapon;

(b) whether it is also a fact that smallpox is more dangerous and contagious than anthrax and it is difficult to contain it; and

(c) if so, the precautionary measures being taken by the Government to deal with the situation?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (PROF. RITA VERMA)

(a) to (c) A statement is laid on the table of the Lok Sabha.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO LOK SABHA UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 1659 FOR 28.11.2001

(a) 1. A detailed list of biological agents used us weapons prepared by the Indian Council of Medical Research along with signs and symptoms, likely method of dissemination, incubation period, lethality and the availability of vaccines, anti-microbial therapy and treatment has been circulated to Health Secretary and Director of Health Services of all States/UTs., and Central Govt. hospitals advising them to take following precautionary steps:

(i) Earmarking of maximum number of beds for emergency contingency

(ii) Stocking of vaccines/sera/drugs to the extent possible

(iii) Setting up a special team of doctors for coordinated action. They should be sensitized on the impact of such weapons and treatment measures.

2. Two expert group meetings were held (1st & 17th October) in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to review the management (diagnosis, treatment, IEC activities etc.) of recently emerging diseases of public health importance like Dengue, Anthrax etc. Eminent experts in the field of medical science from different organizations in the country, senior officials of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and chiefs of different Government and private hospitals in Delhi participated in the meeting and deliberated on various aspects of the bio-terrorism in the backdrop of the current global situation.

3. A meeting-cum workshop on Biological & Chemical Terrorism was convened by Department of Health on 29th October, 2001 New Delhi wherein Health Secretary, Home Secretary and Director of Health Services from various States/UTs., eminent experts in the field of medical science from different organizations in the country and heads of different hospitals in Govt. and private sector in Delhi participated and deliberated on various aspects. The representatives from the States informed the preparatory measures taken by them and assured availability of drugs in adequate quantity to tackle any situation.

(b) & (c) : Yes, Sir. WHO confirms that the best method of stopping a smallpox outbreak if occurs, is search and containment. Vaccination of entire population is not recommended since there is a risk of severe reaction to the vaccine including death.